SECTION 3.5

Agricultural Resources

3.5 Agricultural Resources

3.5.1 Introduction and Summary

This section describes the environmental setting and impacts related to agricultural land uses for the following geographic subregions: LCR and IID water service area and AAC. The regulatory framework for agricultural land uses is provided. Because the majority of known physical activities associated with the Proposed Project and Alternatives would occur within the IID water service area, the IID water service area and AAC geographic subregion is discussed in greater detail than the LCR geographic subregion. Table 3.5-1 summarizes the impacts of the Proposed Project and Alternatives on the agricultural resources of the LCR, IID water service area and AAC, Salton Sea, and SDCWA service area geographic subregions.

3.5.2 Regulatory Framework

This section describes the regulations, plans, and standards applicable to agriculture resources within the four geographic subregions.

3.5.2.1 Federal Regulations and Standards

The Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 (FPPA) requires federal agencies to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. Farmland subject to FPPA requirements does not have to be currently used for cropland. Areas under protection include forestland, pastureland, cropland, or other land, but not bodies of water or urban, developed land.

FPPA requirements apply to projects that could irreversibly convert (directly or indirectly) farmland (as defined above) to nonagricultural use, and are completed by a federal agency or completed with the assistance (e.g., financial assistance) of a federal agency. Projects that are not subject to the FPPA include projects on land already developed for urban uses, land used for water storage, and land used for the construction of on-farm structures needed for farm operations (Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS] 2000).

3.5.2.2 State Regulations and Standards

State regulations and standards that apply to the IID water service area and AAC geographic subregion include the following:

California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act). The California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) enables private landowners to enter into contracts with local governments to restrict specific parcels of land for agricultural use. The Williamson Act was adopted to provide agricultural landowners on the urban fringe, who were under pressure to convert their lands to urban use, with a financially viable alternative to conversion. Under the Williamson Act, agricultural landowners can receive property tax assessments that are much lower than other landowners because the assessments are based on generated agricultural income rather than on market (i.e., development) potential. In return, the landowners enter into contracts committing to maintain their lands for agricultural use. Approximately one-half of the state's agricultural lands (approximately 16 million acres) are subject to Williamson Act contracts.

TABLE 3.5-1
Summary of Agricultural Resources Impacts[1]

Proposed Project: 300 KAFY All Conservation Measures	Alternative 1: No Project	Alternative 2: 130 KAFY On-farm Irrigation System Improvements Only	Alternative 3: 230 KAFY All Conservation Measures	Alternative 4: 300 KAFY Fallowing Only
LOWER COLORADO RIVER				
No impacts.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impacts.	No impacts.	No impacts.
IID WATER SERVICE AREA AND AAC				
AR-1: Reclassification of up to 50,000 acres of prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance: Significant, unavoidable impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impacts.	**A3-AR-1: Reclassification of up to 38,300 acres of prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance:** Significant, unavoidable impact.	**A4-AR-1: Reclassification of up to 50,000 acres of prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance:** Significant, unavoidable impact.
Impact HCP-IID-AR-2 Conversion of 700 acres of agricultural lands from implementation of the HCP: Significant, unavoidable impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	**Same as HCP-IID-AR-2.**	**Same as HCPIID-AR-2.**	**Same as HCP-IID-AR-2.**
Impact HCP-SS-AR-3: Conversion of 30,500 acres of agricultural lands from implementation of the Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy. Less than significant impact.	Continuation of existing conditions.	**Impact A2-HCP-SS-AR-1: Conversion of 40,600 acres of agricultural lands from implementation of the Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy.** Less than significant impact.	**Impact A3-HCP-SS-AR-2: Conversion of 67,300 acres of agricultural lands from implementation of the Salton Sea Habitat Conservation Strategy.** Less than significant impact.	**Impact A4-HCP-SS-AR-2: Same as Impact HCP-SS-AR -3.**
SALTON SEA				
No impacts.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impacts.	No impacts.	No impacts.
SDCWA SERVICE AREA				
No impacts.	Continuation of existing conditions.	No impacts.	No impacts.	No impacts.

[1] Programmatic level analyses of USFWS' biological conservation measures in LCR subregion. Subsequent environmental documentation will be required if potential impacts are identified.

The minimum term for a Williamson Act contract is 10 years, with automatic renewal at the end of each term. At that time, contracts can be terminated by the landowner or local government, which initiates the process of "nonrenewal." If a property is designated for contract nonrenewal, property tax rates gradually increase during the remainder of the contract term until they reach market (i.e., non-restricted) levels. Williamson Act contracts can also be cancelled without completing the non-renewal process. Contract cancellation, however, involves a comprehensive review and approval process and the payment of fees by the landowner equal to 12 percent of the full market value of the property.

Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The purpose of the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) is to provide jurisdictional agencies with information on farmland resources. Imperial County's FMMP information is incorporated into the Imperial County General Plan (see Section 3.4), and is available for land use decisions and to determine acceptable uses for farmlands.

3.5.3 Environmental Setting

3.5.3.1 Lower Colorado River

A number of irrigation and water districts that provide water to agricultural fields border the LCR geographic subregion. The irrigated agricultural areas are in Riverside and Imperial Counties in California, and in La Paz and Yuma Counties in Arizona. Figure 3.5-1 shows the location of these agricultural areas.

Palo Verde Irrigation District (PVID) and Cibola Irrigation District (CID) are in the vicinity of Blythe, California. United States Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)'s Yuma and Gila Projects deliver water from the Colorado River to eight districts, divisions, or units in California and Arizona.

- The Yuma Project delivers water to the following Arizona and California entities:
  - Bard Water District
  - Indian Unit
  - Valley Division
  - Yuma Auxiliary, Unit "B" Irrigation and Drainage District
- The Gila Project delivers water to the following Arizona irrigation districts:
  - Yuma-Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District
  - Yuma Irrigation District
  - North Gila Valley Irrigation District
  - Wellton Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District

Although some of these irrigation districts are not within the identified geographic boundaries for the Proposed Project, they all divert water from the Colorado River at, or upstream of, Imperial Dam. As such, impacts to the LCR resulting from the Proposed Project have the potential to occur in these areas of irrigated agriculture.

Table 3.5-2 shows the total irrigated acres, gross revenues, and predominant crops grown by each of the major irrigation districts that divert water from the LCR within the LCR geographic subregion. Alfalfa hay, wheat, cotton, and lettuce are generally the predominant crops.

3.5.3.2 IID Water Service Area and AAC

The IID water service area is located entirely in Imperial County and contains over 90 percent of the irrigated cropland within the county. Imperial County is an important California agricultural region ranking in the top five, in terms of value of production among California counties for 24 agricultural commodities. Imperial County ranks Number 1 among California counties in value of production for alfalfa hay, onions, wheat, sugar beets, carrots, sweet corn, watermelon, and sudan grass hay (California Agricultural Statistical Service 1999).

The IID water service area is characterized by a mild climate that allows year-round agricultural production of a wide variety of commodities. The soils found in the geographic subregion are the result of centuries of deposits by the Colorado River and, as a result, are naturally saline. Agricultural production is made possible only through the delivery of irrigation water from the Colorado River, and the availability of the Salton Sea as a repository for agricultural drainage.

TABLE 3.5-2
Agriculture Resources in the LCR Geographic Subregion, 1998

Irrigation/Water District	Irrigated Acres	Gross Value of Production (Thousands of Dollars)	Predominant Crops
Palo Verde Irrigation District	109,688	92,012[1]	Alfalfa hay, cotton, wheat, melons, sudan grass
Cibola Irrigation District	5,059	2,542	Alfalfa hay, cotton
Yuma Project:			
Bard Water District	6,880	52,257	Wheat, lettuce, citrus, dates
Indian Unit	7,956	15,460	Wheat, lettuce
Valley Division	53,450	229,612	Wheat, sudan grass, cotton, citrus
Yuma Auxiliary "Unit B" Irrigation and Drainage District	3,400	3,412	Alfalfa hay, citrus
Gila Project:			
Yuma-Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District	20,230	25,207	Alfalfa seed, citrus
Yuma Irrigation District	10,600	75,060	Wheat, lettuce
North Gila Valley Irrigation District	6,587	42,311	Wheat, cotton, lettuce, broccoli
Wellton Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District	62,744	300,269	Wheat, alfalfa hay, cotton, lettuce

Source: Reclamation 1998
[1] Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner 1998

FARMLAND CLASSIFICATIONS

Under the FMMP, an analysis of agricultural land use and changes in land use throughout California is conducted every other year. Figure 3.5-2 shows a map of IID water service area farmlands, designated by farmland classifications as described below. A more detailed explanation of the classifications can be found in "A Guide to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program" (CDOC 2000).

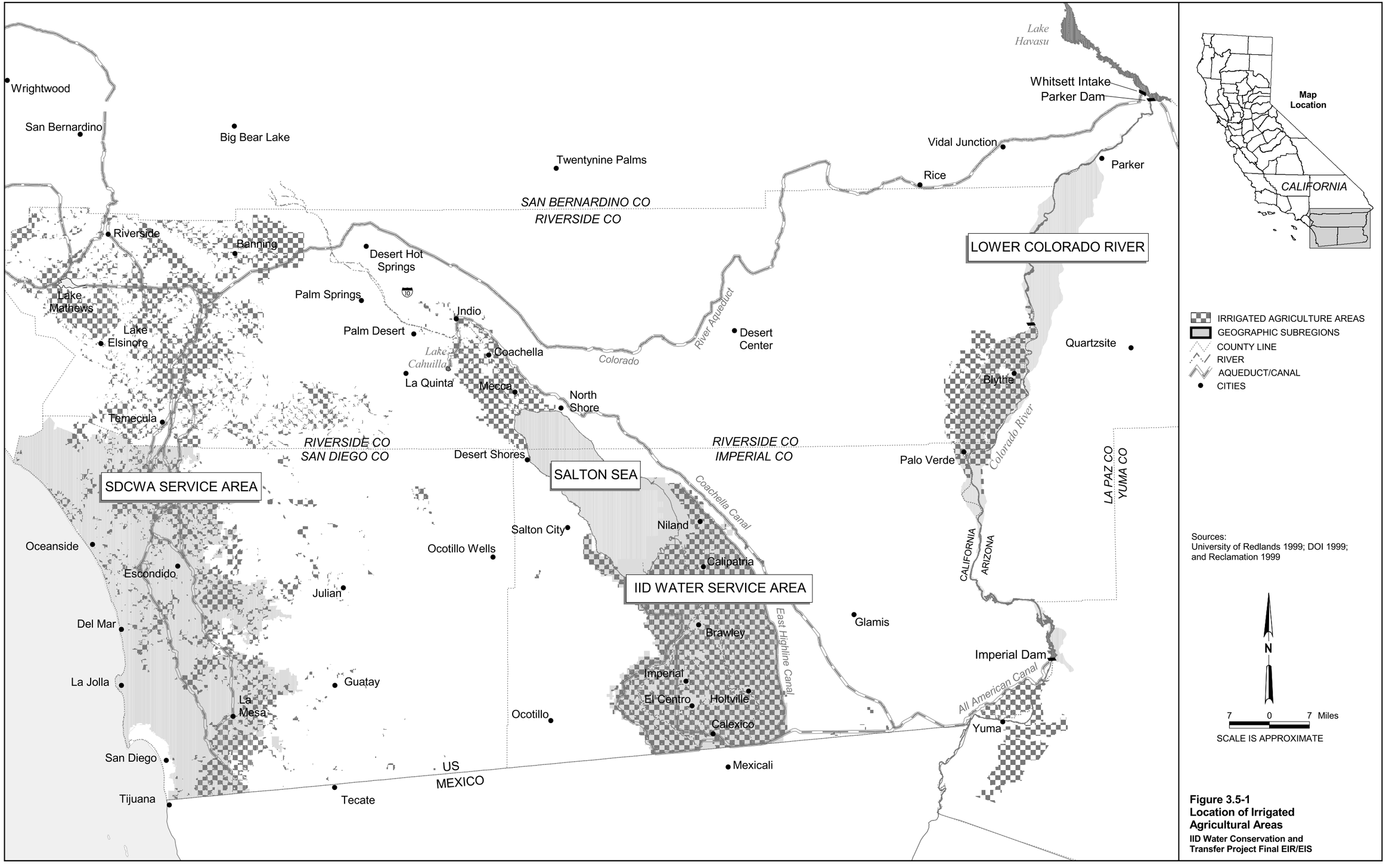

Figure 3.5-1
Location of Irrigated Agricultural Areas
IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project Final EIR/EIS